DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 163 357 CG 013 071

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TITLE The Effects of Physical Appearance and Behavior Upon Ratings of Social Attractiveness.
PUB DATE 7 Apr 78
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association (Denver, Colorado, April 5-8, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Affective Behavior; Behavior; Behavior Rating Scales; Cultural Traits; Individual Characteristics; *Interpersonal Attraction; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Physical Characteristics; Research Projects; Sex Differences; *Social Behavior; *Social Relations; Video Tape Recordings

ABSTRACT

A videotaped interaction between a stimulus person (SP) and an interviewer was viewed by 80 male and 80 female college students. The SP's physical appearance and behavior were varied in a 2 X 2 X 2 factorial design with student gender as the third independent variable. The effects of these three variables upon general attractiveness ratings and interpersonal attraction ratings were determined. Results indicated that both physical appearance (beautiful versus ugly) and behavior (pleasant as compared to unpleasant) had significant effects upon ratings of attractiveness. Both physical appearance and behavior also had a significant effect upon interpersonal attraction ratings. An interaction between physical appearance and behavior showed that unpleasant behavior was a sufficient condition for dislike regardless of appearance. Only when the SP was pleasantly behaved did her physical appearance affect ratings of interpersonal attraction. (Author)

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ED163357

THE EFFECTS OF PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR UPON RATINGS OF SOCIAL ATTRACTIVENESS

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Paper Presented at the
Rocky Mountain Psychological Association Meeting

April 7, 1978

CG 013071

The Effects of Physical Appearance and Behavior upon Ratings of Social Attractiveness

Introduction

The present study was designed to explore the effects of physical appearance and behavior upon ratings of interpersonal attraction (i.e., social attractiveness). In recent social psychology literature, physical appearance has received attention because subjects have been shown to use a person's level of physical appearance as a basis for making judgments about other personal characteristics of that person.

Physical appearance is an obvious personal characteristic which is immediately observable during social interactions and thus contributes to expectations regarding other persons. However, by focusing upon the effects of appearance, previous researchers have implied that appearance alone largely determines initial impressions and evaluations of others. In even a brief interaction between people, more than physical appearance is available as a basis for judgments. Whenever people interact, a sample of behavior is present. It was hypothesized that behavior as well as physical appearance might influence the subjective ratings made by an individual about the characteristics of others. The specific question to be answered in the research was whether behavior would influence the degree of liking expressed toward a stimulus person (SP). Both behavior and physical appearance were manipulated in order to study the relative impact of appearance and behavior upon the ratings of interpersonal attraction.

In many studies of physical appearance, researchers have utilized

photographs of attractive and unattractive SPs. Subjects have been asked to view these photographs and then make judgments about the SPs. The use of photographs afforded good experimental control to the researchers in that it limited the amount of information about the SP which was available to subjects. Thus the judgments made could be assumed to be influenced primarily by the different physical appearance levels of the SPs.

In a study using this type of paradigm, Miller (1970) asked subjects to respond to photographs of SPs previously rated by independent judges as high, moderate, and low in appearance. The subjects viewed the photographs and then rated the SPs on the Adjective Preference Scale. More positive traits were consistently assigned to the more attractive persons. They were seen as more curious, complex, perceptive, calm, confident, assertive, happy, active, amiable, humorous, and flexible. The effects of physical appearance were judged by Miller (1970) to be pervasive and strong determinants of first impressions. Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972) used the same paradigm and asked subjects to make predictions about attractive and unattractive SPs on four indices of future happiness: marital, parental, social, and occupational. As expected, persons rated high in appearance were predicted by the subjects to be more successful in all four areas than persons rated low in appearance. Other studies have continued to replicate these findings: persons higher in physical appearance are judged more positively on other personal characteristics than are persons lower in physical appearance.

The effects of physical appearance, however, seem to be most

powerful in those situations where physical appearance is all that is known about a SP. As other independent variables have been added to the experimental paradigms, the effects of physical appearance have continued to be significant, but have often interacted with the added variables. In their studies of interpersonal attraction (i.e., liking), Byrne, London, and Reeves (1968) investigated the variables of attitude similarity and dissimilarity, physical appearance of a SP, gender of subjects, and gender of the SP with regard to their effects upon attraction. The data indicated that interpersonal attraction was greater toward strangers high in physical appearance than toward strangers low in physical appearance, regardless of gender. In several experiments which followed, Byrne et al. (1968) continued to examine the effects of physical appearance and attitude similarity-dissimilarity upon interpersonal attraction ratings. Their results demonstrated that both physical appearance and similarity-dissimilarity of attitudes influenced attraction responses; subjects reported greatest interpersonal attraction toward beautiful strangers with similar attitudes and least attraction toward ugly strangers with dissimilar attitudes. The research by Byrne et al. (1968) demonstrated that other variables (in their case, attitude similarity-dissimilarity) may interact with physical appearance to influence ratings of interpersonal attraction. Unfortunately, the amount of variance accounted for by physical appearance as compared to the other variables, was not reported. Thus the relative impact of each variable is difficult to judge. It seems evident that physical appearance continues to exert some influence on liking, but it is not known under what conditions its influence is outweighed by other information. When do persons

stop using physical appearance as the primary basis for their judgments or liking for another and give more weight to other information? What variables might be considered by subjects to more important predictors of a person's personality characteristics than physical appearance?

In several experiments where other independent variables have been included, the effects of physical appearance have been much less potent (Adams & LaVoie, 1974; LaVoie & Adams, 1974; Rich, 1974). Adams and LaVoie (1974) and LaVoie and Adams (1974) gave teachers a progress report on a child; a photograph of a child was attached to each report. These researchers varied the conduct of the child, i.e, grades of the child for work habits and attitudes and in personal and social growth, as well as the child's level of physical appearance and gender. The teachers were asked to evaluate the child on various dimensions. The conduct variables were found to significantly influence the teachers' evaluations of the peer relations, behaviors, attitudes, and work habits of the children. The conduct variable also had a significant influence upon the teachers' estimation of a child's percentile rank in class, IQ, level of education attained, and leadership potential (LaVoie & Adams, 1974) as well at the teachers' judgments of parental involvement and interest in the child's performance in school (Adams & LaVoie, 1974). A child's level of physical appearance had a significant influence only upon the teachers' ratings of the child's work habits. The amount of variance which it accounted for was not reported, however.

Rich (1974) also found physical appearance to exert less influence on teachers' judgments when other knowledge about a child was given. When information about behavior and academic performance was given to

the teachers in his study, the effects of physical appearance interacted with the other variables in such a way that ugly children with good report cards were rated more positively in personality development and blamed less frequently for a misbehavior than were beautiful children with a poor report card. The behavior variables seem to have exerted a considerable influence on the results of this study. They clearly interacted with the level of physical appearance and its effects on the dependent variables.

More recently, Solomon and Saxe (1977) examined the effects of physical appearance and intelligence upon impressions of a SP. The impressions were assessed by means of a questionnaire with 17 bipolar personality dimensions. Subjects were also asked to predict their expectations of the SPs future occupational and social success. Significant main effects for intelligence indicated that subjects rated the intelligent SP as having more positive personality characteristics and greater chances of occupational and social success. The significant main effects for attractiveness indicated that subjects rated the attractive SP as having the more positive personality traits as well as more future social happiness. There were no significant interactions between intelligence and attractiveness on any of the dependent measures. The findings of Solomon and Saxe (1977) suggested that impressions were not formed solely on the basis of physical appearance but were influenced by level of intelligence as well. On one measure, predicted future occupational success, intelligence had more of an influence than did physical appearance.

In summary, in the social psychology experiments which have been discussed, physical appearance has been shown to have effects upon the judgments made about a SP and to influence the interpersonal attraction expressed toward a SP. When physical appearance is the only variable manipulated, its effects are powerful. As other variables are added to an experimental design, they begin to interact with physical appearance and to influence the dependent measures. Because physical appearance is rarely the only information available about a person in real life situations, it is important to clarify the parameters of the influence of physical appearance when other variables are included. Specifically, in the present study, the influence of physical appearance and of behavior upon ratings of interpersonal attraction was examined.

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects were 160 undergraduate students from the introductory psychology pool of Texas Tech University. The 80 males and 80 females included in the study participated in return for experimental credit.

Procedure

A 2 X 2 X 2 completely randomized factorial design was used with the SPs level of physical appearance and type of behavior as two independent variables. The gender of the subjects was the third independent variable.

Four videotapes, each ten minutes in length, were made of an interview between a counselor and the SP who was seeking vocational assistance.

The SP, an actress, varied her appearance from beautiful to ugly with the use of clothing, changes in hair style, and theatrical make-up. The behavior of the SP during the interview was either pleasant or unpleasant. In the pleasant conditions, she was polite, interested, and concerned about her vocational directions, while in the unpleasant conditions, she was rude, uninterested, and was seeking counseling only to appease her parents.

Manipulation checks by independent judges insured that the experimental conditions of beautiful and ugly physical appearance and pleasant and unpleasant behavior had been met. Subjects were then randomly assigned to observe the SP in either a beautiful or ugly condition as she behaved either pleasantly or unpleasantly. Each subject viewed only one videotape and then was asked to rate both the SP and the counselor on the dependent variable.

Dependent Variable

The social attractiveness measure utilized was derived from Byrne's (1961) Interpersonal Judgment Scale (IJS). The IJS has been used extensively as a measure of interpersonal attraction (Byrne & Clore, 1966; Byrne, Ervin, & Lamberth, 1970; Byrne, Griffitt, & Reeves, 1969; Byrne & Nelson, 1965; McWhirter, 1969). Interpersonal attraction is defined as the degree of liking or disliking for the person being rated. The last two items of the IJS are added to yield a measure of interpersonal attraction which ranges from 2 (most negative) to 14 (most positive). Split-half reliability has been reported by Byrne and Nelson (1965) as .85 and by McWhirter (1969) as .86.

Results

Table 1 is the source table for the analysis of variance of the interpersonal attraction measure. Although appearance was significant, $F(1, 152) = 5.27$, $p < .05$, it accounted for only a trivial portion of the total variance ($\omega^2 = .01$) in these ratings of attraction. The behavior of the SP, which was also significant, $F(1, 152) = 169.89$, $p < .001$, accounted for a large portion of the total variance ($\omega^2 = .49$). Gender also was significant, $F(1, 152) = 4.99$, $p < .05$, but accounted for only a very small portion of the total variance ($\omega^2 = .01$).

For the interpersonal attraction measure, a significant interaction was found between appearance and behavior $F(1, 152) = 5.27$, $p < .05$. As illustrated in Figure 1, significant differences in interpersonal attraction ratings for the beautiful versus ugly appearance conditions were found only when the SP was behaving pleasantly. In these pleasant conditions, the subjects expressed significantly greater interpersonal attraction for the SP when she was beautiful than when she was ugly. When the SP behaved unpleasantly, there were no significant differences in the interpersonal attraction ratings which she received in the beautiful as compared to the ugly conditions. Only a small amount of variance was explained by this interaction between appearance and behavior ($\omega^2 = .01$). There were no significant interactions between appearance and gender, or between behavior and gender.

Discussion

The interpretation of the interpersonal attraction ratings was somewhat complex. Although physical appearance had a significant effect, its small contribution to the total variance limits the importance of this finding. Behavior had a much greater influence upon the interpersonal attraction ratings than did physical appearance. Pleasantly behaved individuals are liked more than unpleasantly behaved persons.

The interaction between physical appearance and behavior was interpreted as indicating that when the SP was behaving pleasantly, her appearance had a significant effect. Under the pleasant behavior conditions, subjects expressed more interpersonal attraction toward the beautiful as compared with the ugly SP. Thus appearance does have some effect upon liking, if the person is pleasantly behaved. When the SP was unpleasantly behaved, she was disliked (especially by males), no matter how beautiful she was. The influence of appearance then is overwhelmed by her unpleasant behavior.

The gender of the subjects was significant for the interpersonal attraction ratings with male subjects giving the female SP higher ratings in three of the four conditions. Only when the SP was both beautiful and unpleasant, did male subjects give her lower interpersonal attraction ratings than female subjects did. Gender differences in attraction have not been reported in previous studies using female SPs and the IJS as a dependent measure (Byrne et al., 1968; McWhirter, 1969). A possible explanation of these results is that in moving from a paradigm involving photographs to one utilizing videotapes, much more information

about the SP is presented. There is an increase in the number of cues available with the animation of the SP. This increase in cues may have resulted in the more powerful effects found here for gender and thus highlighted gender differences which have existed before but were too subtle to be found. Another possible explanation is that the differences might be the result of cultural change in the past few years. Replications of this experiment with different populations will help determine the stability of the findings.

The results of the present study suggest a need for continued exploration of the variables which affect interpersonal attraction. They also point to the need for a careful interpretation of past research. Physical appearance does affect liking for another and does influence judgments made about persons, but its influence is not as powerful or pervasive as has been suggested. When only physical appearance is varied (through the use of photographs), the effects of physical appearance may account for most of the variance found in the ratings. However, research is beginning to find areas in which the physical appearance of a person is less influential than other variables. Solomon and Saxe (1977) found intelligence to have more of an effect upon judgments of future career success than did physical appearance. They found that both intelligence and physical appearance influenced ratings of a SP on personality traits and predicted success in social areas. LaVoie and Adams (1974) and Adams and LaVoie (1974) found conduct variables to have more of an effect than physical appearance upon many of the expectations for a child's success and ability. The present study

adds to these findings the knowledge that behavior has more of an influence upon the degree of liking expressed for a person than does physical appearance. In regard to interpersonal attraction for another, behavior seems to be the more basic variable.

Table 1

Source Table for the Factorial
Analysis of Variance--Interpersonal Attraction Ratings

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Appearance (A)	34.23	1	34.23	5.27*
Behavior (B)	1102.50	1	1102.50	169.89***
Gender (C)	32.40	1	32.40	4.99*
A X B	34.23	1	34.23	5.27*
A X C	15.63	1	15.63	2.41
B X C	14.40	1	14.40	2.22
A X B X C	4.23	1	4.23	.65
Within Cell	986.39	152	6.49	
Total	2223.99	159	13.99	

***$p < .001$

* $p < .05$

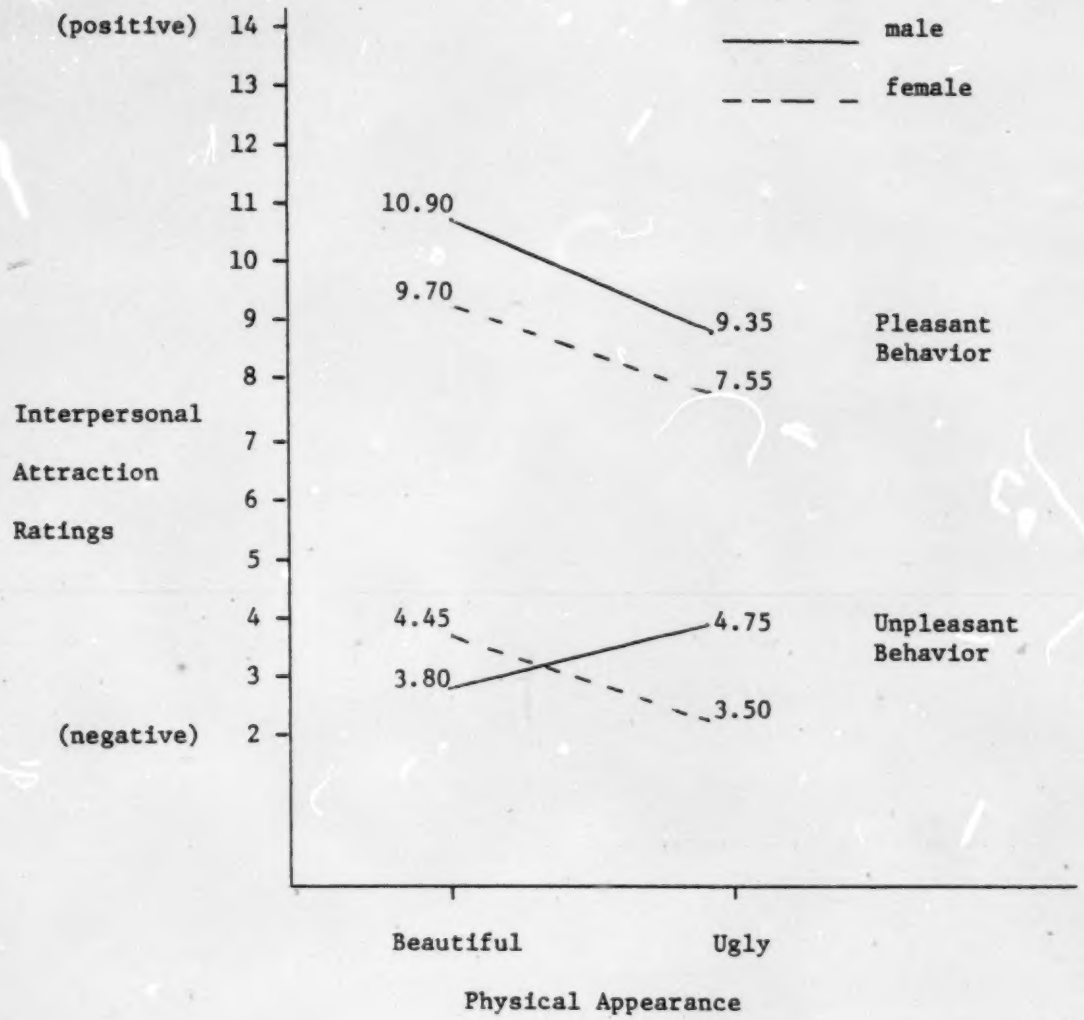

Figure 1. Mean Ratings of Stimulus Person on Interpersonal Attraction Ratings.

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